

AUGUST HILDEBRAND.

In those days there were four sailor boarding houses in
Astoria:-

Mrs. Sophie Collins

Mrs. Bridget Grant

Dick McCarron

Jim Turk

Mrs. Collins was a sort of a motherly woman. The house was kept in orderly fashion; a sort of a boarding house, American style, sound and safe after the then standard. One of the runners of this sailor hotel was Hugh McCormack, straight sort of a chap who afterwards married the Landlady. He lived as a well-to-do farmer and good citizen many years afterwards on Youngs River and afterwards near Seaside, Oregon. From this house no rumor of wrong or questionable doings came to my knowledge.

Mrs. Grant was a character typical of those days. She was made of somewhat sterner material - in fact, she had to be. Fate had thrust upon her a large family to provide for - without the aid of a husband. Remember, those were the days of rugged individualism with no county judge to supervise the subsistence part of the unemployed; no widow's pension and no N.R.A. to guide and help. To her credit be it said that she "manfully" fulfilled her position as provider for the family in those hectic, strenuous times. Yes, she was "Boss" in the Boarding House - and no fooling. Afterwards her boys helped to ease her burden Alex, Jack, Pete, Nace and William. They were all factors in the early life of Astoria - in the front ranks of popular sports and civic festivities.

Be it said to the credit of Mrs. Grant that she was a loyal Astorian. When she died she left real estate and a splendid farm as evidence of her good business acumen and management.

Then there was Dick McCarron, a dark complexioned man of gentlemanly bearing, always well dressed - quick in actions, not any too scrupulous as to the manner of doing things, keen, resourceful and at the same time polished, and at that time connected with Portland.

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Jim Tuerk was a large powerful man, with a somewhat savory reputation that clung to him from former fields of activities supposed in land such as cattle and horse centers, or western gold mining regions.

A sailor boarding house is a sort of a Sailor Hotel, a kind of a haven, a port where a sailor might, so to speak, lay to anchor until the next sailing date - by reputation or experience it was a corral to herd the suspecting and unsuspecting unfortunate sailors until such time that their bodies were in demand by some ship's Captain for that much money per man. This money paid by the Captains for sailors to the boarding house keeper was called blood money - and ranged at that time from \$75.00 to \$150.00 per man.

Every one of these sailor Boarding Houses employed runners - that is, men who attended to getting sailors from and on the ships, by enticement, persuasion or brute force. When I mention this you may picture yourself mentally at the qualifications necessary to be a successful runner.

Ordinary Hotel runners were also employed by regular hotels in those days to meet the passenger vessels and trains. These "barkers" were very mild compared with the polished, resourceful and brutish fellows of the sailor Boarding House, who generally were professional pugilists or aspiring as such.

Many rumors were current as to the mode pursued by these runners in securing from the ships the men and afterwards getting them aboard again - or in shipping some unsuspecting inland lad against his wishes or knowledge. This act is called shanghaiing.

It were mostly British vessels that attended to the ocean traffic - only a few American clipper ships were in evidence - but these had a very bad reputation as to the treatment of sailors. The American shipping was on the decline. There were very few ships of German or other nationalities. Laws of the country forbade a ship sailing without a complete crew.

The lure of the new world and good times on the Pacific Coast compared with European and Atlantic standards was an incentive for many sailors to desert their ships on arrival. Many of these sailors intended to stay to grow up with the new country and accumulate riches. Many did manage to stay ashore in spite of the vigilance of the sailor boarding house keepers and their runners. Many tales of escape from the entanglement could be told, but whiskey, women and dope more often was the undoing of good intentions - it was the snare.

Many Captains allowed the sailors to desert, even connived with the runners for them to induce and seduce the sailors to do so, for it would be profitable for the ships owners to have the sailors forfeit their pay.

However, more often it was a matter of cunning deception and force - a matter of shanghaiing wooden men - and even dead men.

It was openly said at one time that a certain sailor boarding house gang - that is the runners and their helpers, of which there always were many willing to help - for the sake of a drink - while taking a drunken sailor on board a certain ship they deliberately slugged him, hitting him over the head, and then throwing him overboard from a Whitehall boat as useless - dead.

chances with the "elements": wind, waves, whiskey, women and winchesters - than any inland lads. They were real "He-Men", not caring for their lives nor their hereafter. Equally proficient in the handling of oars, sails, fists or pistols. In fair weather or foul - during sunshine or at night, the roar of the breakers on the Columbia River Bar was music to their ears - the clinking beer glasses and the drinking of harder liquor over the saloon bar was as soothing syrup to their nerves. After their strenuous labor the company of the female at the different dance halls was their heavenly paradise on earth. Being mostly single men, the gambling table did service ordinarily, as in a reunion around the family table. The card dealer was the head - the father.

The red light district embraced the north end of Astor Street and adjoining side streets from 6th to 10th.

China town was adjoining on Bond Street and of equal proportions and importance.

The dancing dives had Bar attachments. Of these dancing houses the most prominent were

Geo. Hill

Big Swede

Coach and Horses (Bunker Hill)

The Palace

The most prominent gambling Establishments were

August Erickson

Sam Harris

George Hills

John Stevens

Did they gamble in those days? Well I heard some one explain after he had been in August Erickson's place:- "Monte Carlo" -"Monte Carlo" -!! In this building there were three floors all crowded with small and large gambling paraphernalia in full working order. This was a fancy, expensive establishment:- Cut edges on plate window glass, cut glass, glittering chandeliers, cut glass bar glass ware-- Yes, even today, reproduced in its original gorgeous splendor in furnishings, drapings, pictures, tile floor, heavy brass fittings, large bar and back mirrors, it would be a show place. There was a small stage on the end on which Vaudeville actors, dancers and singers performed to the tune of a Brass Orchestra, the clinking of beer glasses, the zooming of roulette wheels and the metallic sound of money on the bar.

There were in those days about 49 Liquor Saloons in Astoria strung out from the last chance to the first chance saloon; all of a different scale in the social ladder.

To a European, arriving from more settled and civilized countries - countries under firmer governmental control - the confronting conditions were not any too inviting, in fact, perplexing. Contradictions came to notice glaringly. There was very little, if any, cooperation among the different civic, county, state and federal governmental agencies. Rugged individualism dominated and domineered in all its ruggedness.

This individualism had its bright side as well as bad. It created worship of individual valor and strength - hero worship - and contempt for the rights of others; it endangered the tranquility and safety of the community; it created the gangsters as well as the vigilantes; the law breaking as well as the law abiding element.

In those days the sailor boarding house racket was glaringly noticeable for its bad influence on the morale of good citizenship.

Astoria at that time had an unsavory reputation that far outreached any city in the Pacific Northwest, including Portland and Seattle. It was conceded to be on a par with San Francisco and Valparaiso.

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This was plainly seen and witnessed by a watchman of a local cannery - but who discreetly kept what he saw to himself for fear of bodily harm if he had notified the proper authorities.

Two stage lines (horse drawn affairs) furnished transportation between the Scandinavian Cannery, near Tongue Point, to Sam Harris' Corner, the White House Saloon, corner of Bond and 10th Streets. This was practically the business center of the town. Union Town (West Astoria) was as yet in the making. There were no roads, only trails around Smith's Point west, over the hill south, the old military trail also south from Upper Town and to the East to the John Day district from Alderbrook. Besides these arteries of travel other means of communication was Indian fashion, by water.

There were only a few horse drawn vehicles rattling over the planked street.

I can as yet see (in my mind) J. O. Hanthorn and Samuel Elmore putting on style behind their trotters and pacers, trying to make as much noise as possible over the loose planks. And there was Colonel Taylor and Mr. Powell riding their horses with a military air "a la General Sheridan", and Mrs. P. E. Ferchen keeping up the society part on her white charger!

Yes, Astoria was a frontier town in the fullest meaning of the word, however, minus the usual cowboy heroes pictured mentally as indispensable in such settings.

Our heroes, our rougher element, our daredevils were the seafarers, our fishermen, our sailors, yes, our sailor boarding house runners - far more daring than any cowboy - willing to take more